

Senator Stillman, Chair
Representative Guerrero, Chair
Senator Boucher, Ranking Member
Representative Scribner, Ranking Member

February 14, 2011 Public Hearing

Testimony in support of proposed House Bill 6122, An Act Authorizing Newly Licensed Drivers to Carry Siblings as Passengers

My name is Barbara Kelly Hack and I am pediatrician with a subspecialty in Neonatology. I am also the mother of three teenage children.

My oldest child, Austin, is currently a freshman at Stanford University. He was a 2010 National Merit Finalist and is a world champion rower. Because of academic and athletic demands during the school year and the summer, he had his driver's permit for 17 months before he was able to complete the requirements necessary for his license.

Directly on Austin's heels is my second child, Molly, currently a high school senior. Like her brother, she excels in school and is a three-season athlete. She had her permit for nearly a year before she was licensed late this past fall.

My third child, Olivia, is a 14-year-old high school freshman who has yet to begin the driving process.

I applaud the work of the Governor's Task Force on Teen Safe Driving. Too many lives have been lost at the hands of immature, inexperienced teen drivers. The new law has done much to help reduce teen driving accidents and fatalities. This is something we should all celebrate.

That said, I believe the new law has had some unintended consequences. In particular, I firmly believe that the 40-hour driving requirement during the permit period where siblings are not allowed in the car has effectively resulted in most students having less driving time before appearing for their license than was the case with the old law. It is simply not practical for a parent to drive around alone for 40 hours with their child when there are other children in the family. Thus, for most new drivers I know, the 40 hours is just not happening (even if they pretend it is). Not only is this an unrealistic time burden, particularly if parents both work and if the students have full schedules, it is also a significant gas expense in these days of economic hardship. The fact is, most of the driving opportunities for teens occur on their way to school or to and from school-sponsored activities. If there is another sibling in the car, then that is an opportunity lost for the student to drive with his parent. I know of very few parents who will pick up one student at school, drive him home, then return to school so that the permit-holder can drive home without the sibling in the car. Thus, the potential experience is lost. The issue is not needing to have 40 hours of driving experience before presenting for a license. Forty hours seems like an excellent idea. The issue is 40 hours alone, without a sibling in the car. Case in point, for my daughter Molly, a majority of her on-the-road experience occurred when we were college-hunting, out-of-state, with her sister legally in the back seat. She otherwise would not have been able to meet the in-state requirement for well over the year that it already took. I believe that after the first few months of driving with a permit, it should be a parent's decision whether their student is ready to have a sibling in the car. Allowing this would only serve to enhance the experience of the new driver since he would have a much greater chance of actually completing the required 40-hours behind the wheel!

This bill, however, addresses a different facet of the new law: easing sibling restrictions after licensing. I understand that the law was written with an eye towards the bottom rung of the licensing ladder – i.e., those drivers who are licensed within 4 to 6 months of their sixteenth birthday. My guess is that many of

these drivers are exactly the people you don't want on the road -- kids perhaps towards the lower end of their high school classes without after-school activities who actually have the time to go to nightly driving classes. (What do you want to bet most of these kids don't really have 40 hours of alone time driving with their parents?) It makes sense to restrict their ability to drive anyone else in their car until they have had close to a full year of driving experience.

But what about the high achievers? The kids who are so busy with academics and athletics and clubs and music and the school play that they simply don't have time to attend evening drivers' ed classes or drive around town for 40 hours alone with a parent? Many of these kids, our own included, have their permits for well over a year before completing the necessary class and road work to sit for their license. Asking these students to wait yet another 6 months before driving a sibling to school seems excessive. It is also environmentally unconscious.

In our town of Old Lyme, all high school clubs meet before school, earlier than the buses arrive. Thus, students need to drive or be driven to school. For our family, this means my senior daughter (who has been driving for well over a year but who has had her license for only 3 months) drives out of the driveway by herself while I follow her out with our freshman daughter in my car so I can drive her to the same activity. The same thing happens at the end of the day. My senior daughter drives home from crew but can't bring her sister, so I need to drive 10 minutes over the lake to pick up my younger daughter. It's a waste of time, a waste of gas, and a burden on the environment.

I would like to propose a compromise: ease the sibling restriction for students who have had their permit for a year or more to three months. After three months, I propose that new drivers should be able to drive their siblings within the limits of their hometown using only back roads but not the interstates. This would allow siblings to drive to school and to in-town school events together. Since these drivers would have all had over a year of driving experience, they should be no less competent than their 4-month-to-license counterparts who are able to drive siblings at 10 months after obtaining a permit. In fact, I submit that these students are probably more responsible as a whole than their younger counterparts and therefore less likely to drive unsafely. After six months of licensing, they can have full sibling driving privileges as currently provided in the new law. The ability to drive non-family members should remain unchanged as this seems to be where most of the irresponsible driving occurs.

Thank you very much for your time in considering this bill. I appreciate the opportunity afforded me to testify on its behalf.

Sincerely,
Barbara Kelly Hack
6 Stonewood Drive
Old Lyme, CT 06371
860-434-1610
bkellyhack@aol.com